DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 375 516 EA 026 226

AUTHOR Vesper, Nick; And Others
TITLE School Decision Making: The Effect of Two Restructuring Initiatives. Policy Bulletin.
INSTITUTION Indiana Univ., Bloomington. Education Policy Center.
REPORT NO PB-B22
PUB DATE Sep 94
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Decision Making; Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; Governing Boards; *Organizational Change; Participative Decision Making; *Power Structure; School Administration; *School Based Management; *School Restructuring
IDENTIFIERS *Indiana

ABSTRACT

Schools across the nation are experimenting with new forms of decision-making intended to facilitate the restructuring process. To discover whether two of these new forms--school governance groups and formal affiliation with a restructuring movement--affect traditional patterns of influence and authority, the Indiana Education Policy Center School of Education Office conducted a survey of 422 Indiana school presidents, elementary school principals, and secondary school principals. A total of 214 usable responses were received, a 51 percent response rate. Three general conclusions emerged from the data: (1) across all schools surveyed, there appears to have been a general increase in the influence of stakeholders closest to the school site, particularly parents and teachers; (2) despite these reported increases in influence, traditional power relationships among stakeholders appear to have remained relatively stable; and (3) new restructuring initiatives seem to have had only marginal effects on stakeholder influence and decision-making authority in the schools. The data suggest, then, that although restructuring initiatives have facilitated significant changes in authority in some schools, on average the changes that have occurred are relatively minor. (LMI)

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POLICY BULLETIN

School of Education Office

September 1994—No. PB-B22

School Decision Making: The Effect of Two Restructuring Initiatives

by
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Martha McCarthy,
and Carl Lashley

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Schools across the nation are experimenting with new forms of decision making intended to facilitate the restructuring process. To find out whether two of these new forms—school governance groups and formal affiliation with a restructuring movement—are having an effect on traditional patterns of influence and authority, the Indiana Education Policy Center School of Education Office conducted a survey of Indiana school board members and administrators. The survey found that although some changes are taking place, they are not as momentous as many educators and policymakers may have expected.

Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, most states have enacted reform packages aimed at putting into place the resources necessary to improve student achievement. After school districts began to implement these initiatives, attention turned to school governance, that is, to the process by which individuals and groups make decisions about a school's curriculum, instruction, budget, resource allocation, personnel selection, evaluation and retention of students, and other areas affecting school performance. Many observers began to argue that without systemic reform in how schools are governed, student learning was not likely to improve.

Following the decentralization movement under way in the corporate sector, reformers began to concentrate on the school rather than the school district as the locus of change. Restructuring initiatives in teacher empowerment, parent and community involvement, and site-based management have been undertaken as ways to bolster the influence of teachers, parents, and community members and, ultimately, to improve the responsiveness of schools to students' needs.

Have these initiatives had any effect on the way decisions are made in public schools? A survey conducted by the Indiana Education Policy Center School of Education Office suggests that the effects may not be as significant as some might have expected.

Survey Methods

The Center asked Indiana school board presidents, superintendents, and principals about the influence of two restructuring initiatives on the way school decisions are made: (a) formal affiliation with a restructuring movement, such as Indiana 2000 or the Coalition of Essential Schools/RE:Learning, and (b) formation of a school-level governance group.

Formal Affiliation

Formal affiliation with an established restructuring movement means that a school commits to an educational vision or set of principles established by an external group. This new vision usually involves a commitment to change the procedures for making important decisions in the schools. Implementation of the vision, however, is left to each individual school.

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One option for formal affiliation available to Indiana schools is the Indiana 2000 School Restructuring Program. Under Indiana 2000, a school, with the approval of the local board of education, may seek to manage itself, secure waivers of state regulations, and permit admission of students from other attendance areas in the corporation. To participate in this program, a school must adopt the six national education goals and have the support of the bargaining unit. Schools may also affiliate with a number of national restructuring movements, such as the Coalition of Essential Schools/ RE:Learning, the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development's Restructuring Consortium, or the National Alliance for Restructuring Education.

Governance Groups

The second school restructuring initiative investigated in the survey is the formation of a school-level governance group that includes not only teachers and administrators but also individuals outside of school professionals such as parents, community members, and, in some cases, students. This group is more than an advisory board because it has authority to formulate goals and objectives that may or may not be part of a national movement and to make decisions about how to implement them at the local level.

These two initiatives are not mutually exclusive, of course. An affiliated school might introduce a governance group as a way of changing school decision making, or a school governance group might decide to become affiliated with a restructuring movement.

Stakeholders and Decision-Making Areas

On the survey, respondents from Indiana schools and corporations with and without these new restructuring initiatives rated both the current influence and the change in influenceover time of certain stakeholders in selected decision-making areas. The six groups of stakeholders covered by the survey included:

- community members
- parents
- teachers
- principals
- superintendents
- school board members.

The four decision-making areas were:

- budgeting and allocating resources
- making personnel recommendations
- selecting curriculum and student learning experiences
- monitoring school performance.

These four areas are often cited as crucial to restructuring efforts.

Respondents were asked if authority in these four areas had been delegated to the local school site by the school board and if the overall influence of the stakeholders had increased over the previous five years. They were also asked to rank the current influence of particular stakeholders in each of the four areas.

Sample

Surveys were sent to school board presidents and superintendents in 102 Indiana school corporations (204 individuals) and principals in 218 Indiana elementary and secondary schools in those corporations. Half of the sample consisted of respondents in corporations and schools that were formally affiliated with a restructuring movement. The other half consisted of respondents from corporations and schools that were matched to the affiliated group by enrollment and level (elementary or secondary) but were not affiliated with any restructuring movement. Seven questions on the survey dealt with school-level governance groups, and the respondents' answers to two of those questions (naming the group and identifying the school where it is located) determined if the school was considered to have a local governance group.

Overall, 214 of 422 surveys were returned—a return rate of 50.7%. Re-

TABLE 1
RESPONDENTS REPORTING A GOVERNANCE GROUP OR A FORMAL AFFILIATION WITH A RESTRUCTURING MOVEMENT

	No Formal Affiliation	Formal Affiliation	Totals
No Governance Group	34.6% (74)	21.0% (45)	55.6% (119)
Governance Group	12.1% (26)	32.2% (69)	44.4% (95)
Totals	46.7% (100)	53.3% (114)	

TABLE 2
PERCEIVED INCREASE IN STAKEHOLDER INFLUENCE AND DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY

Percentage of all respondents reporting that a stakeholder's influence had increased during previous five years	
Community Members	77.1%
Parents	90.2
Teachers	89.7
Principals	67.8
Superintendents	29.4
School Boards	39.3
Percentage of all respondents reporting that a decision-making area had been delegated to a school during previous five years	
Budgeting	43.5%
Personnel	75.7
Curriculum	75.7
Monitoring School Performance	59.8

spondents from affiliated schools accounted for 114 of the 214 returned surveys (53.3%), while those from nonaffiliated schools accounted for 100 surveys (46.7%); 95 respondents (44.4%) were from schools with a governance group while 119 (55.6%) were from schools without such groups.

Table 1 shows a breakdown of the number of respondents by affiliation and governance group. The largest number of respondents were from schools or corporations with no affiliation and no governance group, the second largest from schools with both an affiliation and a governance group. (Over 80% of the affiliated respondents were associated with either the Coalition of Essential Schools or Indiana 2000.)

Since the number of schools with either a governance group or a formal affiliation but not both was so small, systematic comparisons between the two would have produced statistically insignificant results. This report, therefore, does not make comparisons between these two groups of schools. Rather, it focuses on differences between schools that are involved in one or both of the new initiatives and schools that are involved in neither.

Survey Results

Changes in Influence and Delegation of Authority

To put these differences in context, Table 2 shows (a) the percentage of *all* respondents reporting that influence of the various stakeholders had increased over the previous five years and (b) the percentage of *all* respondents reporting that authority over particular decision-making areas had been delegated to the local site by the school board. The table reflects all 214 respondents regardless of restructuring initiative.

The table indicates that a large majority of respondents reported an increase in the influence of parents (90.2% of respondents) and teachers (89.7%), and a significant majority reported an increase in the influence of community members (77.1%) and principals (67.8%). A much lower percentage of respondents reported an increase in the influence of school boards (39.3%) and superintendents (29.4%). It appears, then, that stakeholders closest to the local school site—parents, teachers, principals, and community members—are gaining at least some additional influence over school decision making.

This influence apparently does not extend to budgetary matters, however. Although school boards seem to be delegating authority for personnel and curriculum to the local school site, they appear to be retaining authority for budgeting. Only 43.5% of respondents reported that more authority over budgeting has been delegated to a local site, compared with over 75% for curriculum and personnel.

Effect of Restructuring Initiatives on Changes in Influence and Delegation of Authority

Table 3 provides a picture of the changing pattern of stakeholder influence and of decision-making areas del-

TABLE 3
PERCEIVED INCREASE IN STAKEHOLDER INFLUENCE AND DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY, BY RESTRUCTURING INITIATIVE[a]

Percentage of respondents reporting that a stakeholder's influence had increased for schools with and without new restructuring initiatives

Stakeholder	Governance Group		Formal Affiliation with a Restructuring Movement	
	With	Without	With	Without
Community Members	82.1%	73.1%	83.3%	70.0%
Parents	95.8	85.7	93.1	88.0
Teachers	93.7	86.6	93.0	86.0
Principals	71.6	64.7	93.0	86.0
Superintendents	25.3	32.8	24.6	35.0
School Boards	34.7	42.9	38.6	40.0

Percentage of respondents reporting that a decision-making area had been delegated to a school with and without new restructuring initiatives

Decision-Making Area	Governance Group		Formal Affiliation with a Restructuring Movement	
	With	Without	With	Without
Budgeting	46.3%	41.2%	41.2%	46.0%
Personnel	70.5	79.8	71.1	81.0
Curriculum	82.1	70.6	77.2	74.0
Monitoring School Performance	54.7	63.9	55.3	65.0

[a] Comparisons between schools with a governance group and schools with a formal affiliation should not be made, since this table does not distinguish schools that have both from schools that have only one or the other.

egated to schools in the presence or absence of one of the two restructuring initiatives under consideration. (Note: This table compares schools with governance groups to schools without governance groups. It also compares schools with a formal affiliation to schools without such an affiliation. The table should not, however, be used to compare schools with governance groups to schools with a formal affiliation, since almost a third of the schools have adopted both initiatives and are included in both columns. The relative influence of each initiative cannot, therefore, be distinguished in this table.)

As Table 3 shows, a higher percentage of respondents at governance-group schools and at affiliated schools reported that the influence of community members, parents, teachers, and principals had increased than did respondents at schools without either of these initiatives. What's more, a lower percentage of respondents at governance-group schools and affiliated schools reported that the influence of superintendents and school boards had increased than did respondents at schools without either of these initiatives. These figures suggest that both of the new restructuring initiatives are amplifying the general increase in influence among stakeholders closest to the schools. (Of course, the figures could also mean that as the influence of these stakeholders increases, the schools they represent may be more likely to form governance groups or become affiliated with a restructuring movement.)

The figures on delegation of authority reveal no such tidy pattern. While a higher percentage of respondents from schools with governance groups than from schools without them reported that school boards had delegated decision-making authority in the areas of budgeting and curriculum, a lower percentage from governance-group schools reported delegation for the other two areas—making personnel recommendations and monitoring school performance. And in only one area—curriculum—was the percentage of respondents who reported delegation higher in affiliated than in non-affiliated schools. Apparently, the presence of a new restructuring initiative has little to do with whether or not school boards are delegating decision-making authority to schools.

Current Overall Influence

The findings described in the previous two sections pertain only to *changes* in influence and delegation of authority in four key decision-making areas. They do not indicate how much influence local stakeholders *currently* have in those areas. This section examines the overall current influence various stakeholders were reported to have, and the next section examines perceived current stakeholder influence in each of the four areas.

Table 4 lists respondents' rankings on a scale from 1 (no influence) to 4 (significant influence) of the current overall influence of community members, parents, teachers, principals, superintendents, and school board members at schools with and without new restructuring initiatives. (Note: The same caveat holds for Tables 4 and 5 as for Table 3. That is, these tables should not be used to compare schools with governance groups to schools with a formal affiliation, since they do not distinguish schools that have both of these restructuring initiatives from schools that have only one or the other.)

In each of the four categories (schools with a governance group, schools without a governance group, schools with a formal affiliation, and schools without a formal affiliation), respondents rated principals as the most influential stakeholders, followed by superintendents, teachers, school boards, parents, and community members. The only two stakeholder groups for whom a restructuring initiative made any statistically significant difference were teachers and superintendents. Teachers in schools with a governance group were rated as somewhat more influential than teachers in schools without such a group, and superintendents at both governance-group schools and affiliated schools

TABLE 4
COMPARISON OF STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEIVED OVERALL INFLUENCE, BY RESTRUCTURING INITIATIVE[a]

Stakeholder	Governance Group		Affiliation with a Restructuring Movement	
	With	Without	With	Without
Community Members	2.32[b]	2.18	2.25	2.23
Parents	2.50	2.39	2.37	2.25
Teachers	**3.30**[c]	**3.13**	3.24	3.17
Principals	3.65	3.67	3.64	3.68
Superintendents	**3.32**	**3.54**	**3.32**	**3.58**
School Boards	2.99	3.05	3.00	3.04

[a] Comparisons between schools with a governance group and schools with a formal affiliation should not be made, since this table does not distinguish schools that have both from schools that have only one or the other.
[b] Mean level of influence on a scale from 1 (no influence) to 4 (significant influence).
[c] Numbers in bold reflect statistically significant differences.

were rated as somewhat less influential than superintendents at schools without these initiatives.

With only these two exceptions, the table suggests that these restructuring initiatives make little difference in terms of the overall influence of selected stakeholders on educational decision making.

Perceived Current Influence of Stakeholders in Each Decision-Making Area

Table 5 provides a breakdown of the perceived influence of each of the six stakeholder groups in each of the four decision-making areas by restructuring initiative (governance groups and formal affiliation). Like the previous table, Table 5 suggests that, for most stakeholders in most areas, neither of the restructuring initiatives has had a major effect on influence. Regardless of affiliation or governance group, respondents reported that superintendents had the most influence on budgeting, principals on making personnel recommendations and monitoring school performance, and teachers on selecting curriculum.

The only decision-making area where restructuring initiatives seemed to have much effect was personnel. In schools with a governance group, community members, parents, and teachers all were reported to have more influence on personnel recommendations than in schools without a governance group, and superintendents to have less influence. In schools with a formal affiliation, superintendents also were reported to have less influence on personnel, but there were no statistically significant changes for the other stakeholders.

In two other areas—selecting curriculum and monitoring school performance—superintendents also were reported to have less influence in schools with either of the new restructuring initiatives than in schools without. There were no statistically significant changes in influence for any other

TABLE 5
COMPARISON OF STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEIVED INFLUENCE IN DECISION-MAKING AREAS, BY RESTRUCTURING INITIATIVE [a]

	Governance Group		Formal Affiliation with a Restructuring Movement	
	With	Without	With	Without
Budgeting				
Community Members	2.06[b]	1.82	1.92	1.94
Parents	**2.00**[c]	**1.67**	1.94	1.70
Teachers	2.69	2.48	2.63	2.51
Principals	3.32	3.29	3.30	3.30
Superintendents	3.74	3.84	3.75	3.84
School Boards	3.55	3.68	3.61	3.65
Personnel				
Community Members	**2.19**	**1.89**	1.98	2.06
Parents	**2.13**	**1.83**	2.04	1.89
Teachers	**2.86**	**2.55**	2.77	2.61
Principals	3.86	3.91	3.88	3.90
Superintendents	**3.44**	**3.66**	**3.43**	**3.70**
School Boards	2.97	2.74	2.88	2.79
Curriculum				
Community Members	2.42	2.26	2.36	2.30
Parents	2.63	2.45	2.57	2.49
Teachers	3.95	3.90	3.92	3.92
Principals	3.54	3.57	3.55	3.56
Superintendents	**2.74**	**3.03**	**2.75**	**3.06**
School Boards	2.34	2.51	2.27	2.60
Monitoring School Performance				
Community Members	2.35	2.35	2.35	2.35
Parents	2.45	2.43	2.47	2.40
Teachers	3.55	3.42	3.52	3.44
Principals	3.88	3.88	3.84	3.93
Superintendents	**3.35**	**3.64**	**3.33**	**3.72**
School Boards	2.92	3.02	2.94	3.01

[a] Comparisons between schools with a governance group and schools with a formal affiliation should not be made, since this table does not distinguish schools that have both from schools that have only one or the other.
[b] Mean level of influence on a scale from 1 (no influence) to 4 (significant influence).
[c] Numbers in bold reflect statistically significant differences.

stakeholders in either of these two areas.

The only statistically significant difference in the area of budgeting was for parents in schools with a governance group, who were reported to have more influence over the budgeting process than parents in schools without a governance group. Despite this difference, parents still had less influence on budgeting than any other stakeholder group (with the exception of community members at affiliated schools).

In interpreting the results about the relationship between restructuring initiatives and stakeholder influence, two points should be borne in mind. First, although some of the differences are statistically significant, none is dramatic; all are about one third of a point on a four-point scale. Second, it is not possible to determine for certain whether a restructuring initiative affected stakeholder influence or vice versa. For example, it may be the case that already higher levels of influence among parents and teachers encouraged schools to adopt a governance group, rather than that a governance group led to higher influence among parents and teachers.

Governance Groups, Formal Affiliation, or Both?

It is tempting to conclude from Tables 4 and 5 that governance groups have a larger effect on the influence of various stakeholders than formal affiliation does. After all, there are more than twice as many statistically significant differences in the governance group than in the formal affiliation column. As explained earlier, however, this conclusion is invalid, because many schools in the governance group column also have a formal affiliation, and vice versa. Also as noted earlier, the number of respondents from schools with either a governance group or a formal affiliation but not both was too small to enable sound comparisons.

TABLE 6
COMPARISON OF STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEIVED INFLUENCE IN DECISION-MAKING AREAS AT SCHOOLS WITH BOTH, ONE, AND NO RESTRUCTURING INITIATIVES

	Both Governance Group and Formal Affiliation with a Restructuring Movement	Either Governance Group or Formal Affiliation with a Restructuring Movement, but Not Both	No New Restructuring Initiative
Budgeting			
Community Members	0.92 [a]	1.04	0.92
Parents	0.94	0.83	0.66
Teachers	2.49	2.62	2.14
Principals	3.26	3.16	3.15
Superintendents	**3.57** [b]	**3.87**	**3.82**
School Boards	3.34	3.39	3.63
Personnel			
Community Members	0.88	1.03	0.83
Parents	1.06	1.04	0.86
Teachers	2.70	2.38	2.45
Principals	**3.78**	**3.96**	**3.93**
Superintendents	**2.80**	**3.34**	**3.52**
School Boards	1.81	1.91	1.97
Curriculum			
Community Members	1.36	1.48	1.46
Parents	1.90	1.81	1.71
Teachers	3.70	3.80	3.74
Principals	3.49	3.57	3.60
Superintendents	**2.43**	**2.91**	**3.13**
School Boards	1.71	1.91	2.17
Monitoring School Performance			
Community Members	1.58	1.91	1.63
Parents	2.19	2.22	1.88
Teachers	3.57	3.32	3.36
Principals	3.80	3.87	3.92
Superintendents	**3.14**	**3.54**	**3.63**
School Boards	2.62	2.91	2.84

[a] Mean level of influence on a scale from 1 (no influence) to 4 (significant influence).
[b] Numbers in bold reflect statistically significant differences.

It is possible, however, to compare schools with both a governance group and a formal affiliation to schools with one or the other initiative and schools with neither. While such a comparison cannot reveal *which* initiative may be responsible for changes in influence, it can provide some indication of the impact of a *combination* of the two initiatives.

Table 6 compares the perceived current levels of influence of the six stakeholder groups in each of the four decision-making areas at schools with both restructuring initiatives, schools with one or the other initiative, and schools with neither initiative. In each of the four decision-making areas, superintendents were reported to have statistically significant lower influence at schools with both new initiatives than at schools with one or no initiatives. Also, principals at schools with both initiatives were reported to have lower influence on personnel recommendations than principals at schools with one or no initiatives. No stakeholder group was reported to have statistically significant *higher* influence in schools with one or both initiatives than in those with neither.

In only one decision-making area—monitoring school performance—did the difference among superintendents and principals affect the ranking of influence among stakeholders. At schools with both restructuring initiatives, teachers ranked second in influence on monitoring school performance, while superintendents ranked third. In the other two categories (one or neither), superintendents ranked second and teachers third. In all three cases, the principal was reported to have the most influence on monitoring school performance. Here again, one cannot tell for sure whether reduced superintendent influence led to affiliation and the adoption of governance groups or vice versa.

Conclusions

Three general conclusions emerge from this study of restructuring initiatives in Indiana schools:

1. Across all schools involved in the survey, there seems to have been a general increase in the influence of stakeholders closest to the school site, particularly parents and teachers.
To a lesser extent, community members and principals have also seen their influence increase.

2. Despite these reported increases in influence, traditional power relationships among stakeholders appear to have remained relatively stable.
The influence of parents and community members remains low; superintendents and school boards still retain control over budgets; and principals continue to exert substantial authority over most decisions—exactly what one was likely to find in schools 20 or even 50 years ago.

3. New restructuring initiatives seem to have had only marginal effects on stakeholder influence and decision-making authority in the schools.
To be sure, the restructuring initiatives did seem to be amplifying somewhat the general trend toward increased influence of parents, teachers, principals, and community members. Also, superintendents of schools with both initiatives appear to have somewhat lower influence in all four decision-making areas than superintendents of schools without the initiatives. However, these effects were not particularly consequential, rarely affecting traditional power relationships. Indeed, regardless of whether a school had a governance group, a formal affiliation with a restructuring movement, or neither, principals were reported to have the most overall influence, followed by superintendents, teachers, school boards, parents, and community members. Also regardless of restructuring initiative, superintendents had the most influence on budgeting, principals on making personnel recommendations and monitoring school performance, and teachers on selecting curriculum. Finally, the restructuring initiatives seem to have had little effect on delegation of authority in key decision-making areas.

This study suggests, then, that although restructuring initiatives no doubt have prompted significant changes in authority at some schools, on average the changes that have taken place are relatively minor.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent positions of the Indiana Education Policy Center or its funders, the Lilly Endowment Inc. and Indiana University.

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Keep an eye out for two upcoming Center publications:

- *a calendar of education reform in Indiana from 1980 to 1994*
- *a policy bulletin on Indiana's workforce testing initiative*

POLICY BULLETIN NO. PB-B22
September 1994

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